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What Will Opioid Legislation do for Pharmacy and Opioid Risk Management?

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In October 2018, Congress passed H.R.6, the “Substance Use-Disorder Prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities Act” (also known as SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act). As a high-level overview, the legislation contains provisions that seek to encourage alternative forms of pain management, restrict the importation of illegal substances into the United States, reduce excess opioid prescriptions, promote safe disposal of prescription drugs, and strengthen prescription drug monitoring programs. Some of the key provisions of the “SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act” that can reasonably be expected to advance efforts related to opioid risk management programs include components related to Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) and better information sharing related to substance use disorder (SUD) records. The Act orders the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to evaluate the extent to which Medicare Advantage plans are offering MAT and covering non-opioid alternative treatments not covered under traditional Medicare as part of supplemental benefits. The new legislation removes barriers to sharing patient information about substance use disorder (including OUD) and requires the HHS to develop best practices for prominently displaying SUD treatment information in electronic health records, when requested by the patient. These legislative advances are an encouraging step forward in the effort to combat the opioid epidemic, and we will continue to monitor opportunities to enhance our programs and policies to align with best practice recommendations and to capitalize on expanding treatment information and resources.

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